

Garden State Preservation Trust

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Garden State Preservation Trust Releases Policy Recommendations and Preservation Progress Report

The Garden State Preservation Trust (GSPT) today released its second progress report to the Governor and the Legislature. In addition to providing fiscal year 2001 preservation data, the report also presents a number of policy recommendations that advance achievement of the State's goals to preserve land and historic sites and provide recreational facilities.

In concert with Governor McGreevey's goal to implement a model preservation program, the report's recommendations seek to further promote urban open space while preserving the State's critical watershed, wildlife and agricultural lands, leverage GSPT financial resources to accomplish these objectives, improve coordination of open space planning, and ensure the integrity of the public's investment in conservation easements.

"Time and again, the wisdom of commitment to land preservation has been demonstrated – of setting aside land to protect the natural environment, its farmland resources or open spaces. Similarly, protecting and restoring historic sites secure long-term societal benefits", wrote Governor McGreevey on the report's first page. Upon release of the GSPT report, Governor McGreevey stated, "We must do all we can to create open space opportunities in our State's urban areas, leverage our resources dedicated to preservation and responsibly plan, coordinate and steward our preservation projects. The recommendations offered in the GSPT report take a bold step in this direction".

William Brooks, Jr., GSPT Chairman, noted, *"The GSPT has dedicated itself to intelligently leveraging its resources in order to preserve as much land and as many historic sites as possible, while providing ample recreational opportunities throughout the State. Governor McGreevey shares these objectives and his support is commendable as it will leave a great and lasting legacy to the people of New Jersey."*

The report's recommendations seek to further promote urban open space by:

- providing up to a tripling of dollars for local recreational development;
- directing the portion of State acquisition/development funding dedicated to "densely populated counties" to the State Plan's "Planning Area 1 and planning areas immediately adjacent thereto, and/or the Hackensack Meadowlands" (i.e., to provide increased urban focus);
- creating a local stewardship (operations and maintenance) fund with \$5 million kickoff endowment when funds become available; and
- supporting the Arthur Kill Greenway.

The recommendations seek to leverage GSPT resources by:

- tailoring GSPT bonding structure so as to maximize resources available for preservation and recreational development through FY 2009 (this provides many millions of dollars more for projects while staying within the constitutionally dedicated budget);
- supporting enactment of legislation to authorize and facilitate the use of installment purchase agreements by the open space, farmland and historic preservation programs (allows more land to be preserved at today's prices, rather than more expensive future prices); and
- supporting significant federal funding for open space.

In order to improve coordination of open space planning, the GSPT recommendations support DEP efforts to identify those lands most important to protecting the State's water quality resources, particularly watershed lands draining to important water supply sources. Also, the recommendations support and commend the process now underway to prepare the Garden State Greenways Plan. Finally, recommendations to better protect the public's investment in conservation easements are included.

Garden State Preservation Trust—Background and Overall Progress to Date

The Governor and the State Legislature established the GSPT on June 30, 1999 to oversee the permanent preservation of an additional one million acres of land in New Jersey, as well as the preservation of New Jersey's significant historic resources. The GSPT consists of a 9 member, bipartisan board comprised of 4 cabinet officials, 1 public member appointed by the Governor, 2 public members chosen by the Senate President, and 2 public members chosen by the Assembly Speaker. The GSPT reviews and recommends to the Governor and Legislature open space and farmland preservation projects and historic preservation projects from among those submitted to it by the State Green Acres Program, the State Agriculture Development Committee and the New Jersey Historic Trust. In addition, the GSPT monitors the State's progress in meeting policy goals associated with preservation, including securing lands that protect water quality and quantity, key wildlife habitat, and prime agricultural soils as well as those that provide diverse recreational opportunities. It also makes policy recommendations to the Governor and Legislature on issues related to land and historic preservation and recreation, provides educational information regarding benefits of open space and historic preservation and promotes and leverages State and federal funding to maximize achievement of the goals of the program.

As of July 1, over 260,000 acres of open space and farmland had been preserved toward achieving the statutory goal to preserve an additional million acres of land in the State. The GSPT has also approved approximately \$50 million in recreational development projects, and over \$13 million in historic preservation projects throughout the State. The report provides lists of projects completed in FY2001, by county and municipality. FY2000 data was published previously, and FY2002 data will be published as soon as final acreage figures become available.

